DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 224 512 JC 820 555

AUTHOR Brawer, Florence B.
TITLE Promoting a Liberal Education.
INSTITUTION Center for the Study of Community Colleges, Los Angeles, Calif.
PUB DATE 5 Apr 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (62nd, St. Louis, MO, April 4-7, 1982).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Education; Advisory Committees; Articulation (Education); *Community Colleges; Community Services; *Curriculum Development; Curriculum Problems; Honors Curriculum; Humanities; Interdisciplinary Approach; Learning Laboratories; *Liberal Arts; Organizational Objectives; Transfer Programs; Two Year Colleges; Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Within a climate characterized by increasingly diverse and nontraditional student populations and by general student disinterest in learning, the liberal arts have declined precipitously in community colleges. Rather than serving primarily as stepping stones to higher education, community colleges now serve mainly as sources of occupational and remedial education and cultural and recreational activities. Transfer programs have become especially weak with little linearity of sequence in the curriculum. At many colleges efforts have been made to restructure and strengthen the liberal arts, including: (1) the integration of liberal arts courses in community services and continuing education into the regular academic program; (2) the placement of liberal arts instruction in occupational courses; (3) the improvement and expansion of interdisciplinary offerings; (4) the extended use of learning laboratories and other student support services in liberal arts courses; (5) closer articulation with high schools; (6) the establishment or expansion of honors programs to attract gifted students; (7) the creation of liberal arts advisory committees to help formulate goals, evaluate programs, and improve job placement; and (8) the development of a liberal arts career program to prepare students for careers for which an understanding of society and good communications skills and work habits would provide a strong foundation. With involvement, dialogue, and outreach, each of these activities could and should be strengthened. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED224512

PROMOTING A LIBERAL EDUCATION

Florence B. Brawer

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

JC 820 555

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Florence B. Brawer

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
A NON PROFIT CORPORATION

ARTHUR M. COHEN
JOHN LOMBARDI
FLORENCE B. BRAWER

1047 GAYLEY AVENUE, SUITE 205
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90024
(213) 208-6088

C-12

Address given to American Assn. of Community and Junior Colleges' Annual meeting, St.Louis, Missouri April 5, 1982

Promoting a Liberal Education
Florence B. Brawer

Various data sources, published documents, and recently, the popular press suggest that we are still experiencing repercussions of the sixties and seventies. Student cries for relevance in their course materials, for the right to select the number and types of classes they take without considering previous requirements, and for reduction in the work they do outside class have all had their effects. Many colleges and universities have respcnded by inflating grades and eliminating entrance and exit testing. And many educators--administrators and faculty alike-- have adopted laissez-faire attitudes which contribute to the prevailing notion that just as access to post-secondary education was easy, so are the demands placed on students.

The most lenient, the most accessible, and the most strongly affected institutions are the community colleges. Here swelling numbers of people, many labeled "non-traditional" because they deviated so greatly from the type of student enrolled in colleges in the fifties and earlier, were swayed by a do-anything-you-like attitude. If they did not want to enroll in a prescribed number or sequence of courses, or if they did not have sufficient prerequisites for those few courses that still demanded certain proficiencies, they could always participate in the college's much touted community education offerings. These students, so nonchalant in their approach to higher education, came from all strata of society--affluent and poor, traditional and non-conformist, white and minority, intelligent and barely literate. What they all held in common was, for sundry reasons, an interest in higher education.

JC 820 555

with a concomitant disinterest in learning, a desire to "get there"--wherever there might be-- without putting forth the effort.

In this climate, the liberal arts declined precipitously. And with this decline, successful transfer to a four year college or university has become almost impossible. Indeed, the community colleges do not serve as stepping stones to higher learning for most students. Instead, these postsecondary institutions provide them with occupational studies, remedial education, and a variety of ad hoc cultural and recreational activities. More than half the students entering community colleges do so for purposes of occupational training. Remedial studies are prominent; one-third of all mathematics offered in community colleges is at the less-than college algebra level and three of eight English class enrollments are in remedial courses.

As the data and reports indicate, the so-called transfer programs are especially weak. Ostensibly comprised of courses similar to those that students would take if they were enrolled in the lower division of senior institutions, the transfer programs have become a catch-all for students who already have degrees--or who have no aspirations toward one--and for those who have failed to gain entrance to one of the community college's selective-admissions allied health or technology curriculums. In fact, outside the occupational programs, there is little linearity or sequence in curriculum. Few sophomore level courses are offered; few courses demand prerequisites.

The curriculum has taken a lateral form with students dropping in and out almost at will. And the colleges have stepped completely outside the tradition of higher education, a tradition that was based on academic disciplines, the liberal arts, scholarship, and the process of learning. Instead, these post-secondary institutions have become agencies preparing people for the work

force, offering short-cycle courses of interest to limited numbers of the citizenry, and attempting to remedy the defects occasioned by the failures of the lower schools.

Since the community colleges serve as the main point of entry to post-secondary education for most students who continue their studies beyond the high school, the form of education they provide is important to all who are concerned with higher education in America. More than half the students who begin college begin in a community college; forty percent of all first time in college, full-time freshmen; two thirds of the ethnic minorities. The community colleges have indeed opened education beyond the high school for sizeable numbers of people who would never have attended college, thus popularizing higher education and affording access. But access to what? If the 4.5 million students attending the 1250 two-year colleges in America find a curriculum comprised nearly exclusively of career, compensatory, and community-based studies, those who seek access to the higher learning have been ill-served. And the tradition of liberal learning in American higher education has been debased.

Those who would maintain the liberal arts in the community colleges have attended primarily to preserving the disciplines and patterns of thought by a continued adherence to freshmen and sophomore type courses in college parallel programs. They have sought to have these courses required for students who would obtain associates degrees. But it is a constant battle. Most students come to community colleges seeking job skills or recreation; most are part-timers; fewer than five percent obtain degrees. More students transfer to universities from occupational programs than from so-called transfer programs.

Few students graduate. Most community college students eschew the associate in arts degree; most avoid liberal arts courses per se; many who attempt liberal arts courses fail to complete them.

If the liberal arts have a contribution to make to the lives of all students, they must be reconceptualized to fit the realities of community colleges. It is time to restructure them so that they have a place beyond that which they occupy in the college parallel programs, to extract their finest principles so that they can be included in the career, compensatory, and community education programs that dominate the curriculum, and to expand them lest they fade out as surely as the transfer programs are fading.

In the course of our work with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation and in our current projects funded by the Mellon and Ford Foundations, we are organizing several activities to enhance the liberal arts and to facilitate student transfer to universities and to occupations of choice. These activities are concerned with integrating the liberal arts in community services and continuing education, developing liberal arts segments in occupational programs, designing interdisciplinary courses, encouraging the use of student support services, articulating with secondary schools as well as with four-year colleges and universities, promoting honors programs for selected studies, providing advisory committees to the liberal arts, and developing a liberal arts career option. Most of the 38 colleges in our six districts--Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, Maricopa (Phoenix), Miami-Dade, and St. Louis, are engaged in some of these activities now. However, most activities could be strengthened, modified, and extended. The remainder of this paper will discuss briefly these eight activities.

LIBERAL ARTS IN COMMUNITY SERVICES AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

Portions of the liberal arts are thriving in certain community service and continuing education programs. Community forums in the humanities and courses by newspaper have been developed, and arts and crafts, concerts, exhibits, museum shows are in place in most districts. But the link between these activities and the academic program is missing.

The community service and continuing education divisions have typically maintained liberal arts-related activities for adults. The courses have been populated by people taking them for personal interest, not for degree credit. And with rare exception, they have been taught by instructors other than the regular faculty.

A useful linkage between the non-credit presentations in the liberal arts and the regular academic program could be effected. The continuing education directors might be encouraged to give first priority to the regular faculty in selecting staff. Faculty could be stimulated to prepare courses and presentations to be offered through the community service divisions. Necessary budget links should be forged by the administrators.

LIBERAL ARTS IN OCCUPATIONAL AREAS

Because career program coordinators insist that certification requirements preclude students from taking courses outside the occupational program itself, it is extremely difficult to maintain liberal arts course requirements for students enrolled in career programs. Offering a host of optional courses for purposes of displaying degree requirements does little to point up the value of such courses and their relevance to the student's career objective.

Accordingly, rather than attempting to coerce students in occupational programs to take courses in the liberal arts, portions of certain liberal arts

courses--hence concepts--can be placed in the occupational courses themselves. These course modules could be as little as an hour or two of lecture by a liberal arts instructor on key concepts stemming from one of the academic disciplines. The purpose of the short segment would be to point up to the students some of the implications of their career practice. Successful interventions of this type have been made by philosophy instructors teaching medical and business ethics, history instructors discussing backgrounds of rules governing occupations, art instructors pointing up design implications in certain manufacturing tasks, anthropology instructors discussing cross-cultural patterns of dealing with social and personal issues, geography instructors discussing what students in a travel agent program need to know.

Such modular interventions could be made if the concerned liberal arts instructors were given course load credit for applying the requisite number of hours to the guest appearances in the occupational programs.

Some documents regarding this activity are available through ERIC. The AACJC has sponsored several regional workshops devoted to these activities under grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

INTERDISCIPLINARY COURSES

According to Center data, the integrated or interdisciplinary courses in the sciences, social sciences, humanities, and communications were among the few areas to show an increase in enrollments in the 1970s at a time when courses in the specialized study of history, literature, music, art, and other liberal arts areas showed a severe decline. This resurgence resulted from cancellation of the specialized classes and the merging of course components into required general education interdisciplinary units.

The most successful interdisciplinary courses have been in the humanities and the social sciences. Some take an historical perspective; others are

based on a problem-solving or conceptual approach. The interdisciplinary science courses are often concerned with the environment.

Building and sustaining required interdisciplinary courses calls for much administrative leadership. The faculty who work together on such courses cannot merely provide short units in their own disciplines. Although considerable time is necessary to develop interdisciplinary courses, one important concomitant is the collegial relationships that develop among participating faculty members. And students are provided with both an overview and an integration of the liberal arts that might not otherwise be available to them.

Information on interdisciplinary courses is available in several Center/ERIC monographs: Science Education in Two-Year Colleges: Environmental Sciences, Science Education in Two-Year Colleges: Interdisciplinary Social Sciences, and The Humanities in Two-Year Colleges: Trends in Curriculum.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Every college has a wide array of academic support services; learning laboratories, tutorial services, counseling activities. The association between these services and the liberal arts courses, however, is not always as clear as it might be. These links could be strengthened in a number of ways so that they serve more students.

Historically, the science courses have had laboratory components whereby the students spend an hour or two in a laboratory for every hour in the lecture section. This concept could be extended to other areas of the liberal arts with the laboratory being, in fact, the learning laboratory. Point-of-entry tests to the regular academic courses could be administered. Then, for students falling below a certain cut point on reading or writing skills, an hour or two per week in the learning laboratory could be required as part of the regular course. Exit testing could also be administered to students

intending to transfer to universities, thus guaranteing certain course expertise.

This pattern would work best if the nature of the experience in the learning laboratory were merged with the content of the course itself. Thus the liberal arts instructors would have to work out pattern sequences with the laboratory manager, just as the physics or chemistry instructors key the laboratory experiences to the lecture sections. Similar associations could be made between the faculty and the tutorial services and with the other activities currently maintained on behalf of the less well-prepared students. Compensatory education through support services would be a natural for those individuals who require special assistance.

ARTICULATION WITH SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The liberal arts program can be strengthened by better relationships with the secondary schools. Matching liberal arts courses with the lower division in nearby universities may be useful, but only a relatively few students transfer to universities, whereas nearly all of them matriculate from neighboring high schools.

Counselors have typically been the ones to maintain high school relationships. Now, articulation with the secondary schools can take several other forms. For example, the liberal arts faculty could work more closely with their secondary school counterparts to keep the college courses from becoming either repetitious of secondary school classes or removed in concept from anything for which the students have been prepared. Visits by community college instructors to secondary school liberal arts classes and by secondary school instructors to community college classes could be increased.

Students can be recruited to liberal arts courses in the community colleges if instructors and counselors make particular efforts to do so through the

secondary schools. Advance placement of high school seniors has been undertaken in numerous institutions. But the instructors themselves should take the initiative in going into the high schools to publicize their own courses.

And finally, the community college instructors in the liberal arts could help define expectations for students coming to the college. For too many years the colleges have sent the message that it matters little how well or poorly the students perform in the secondary school; the college will enroll them anyway. The secondary schools can be bolstered by new information about the competencies expected of college students, as Miami-Dade is doing. And feedback to secondary school instructors could be provided with information about former students who enroll in the community college liberal arts classes and the success that they are having.

HONORS PROGRAM

Establishing an honors program is another activity that hearkens back to an earlier era when colleges were more structured and success was better defined. Some college districts are already involved in such programs, while others may be interested in formulating them.

The Honors Program could involve two groups of students. In both instances, however, these programs would be closely tied to student services. College recruiters--faculty and counselors--could interview the most promising high school students and offer special inducements to them to spend their freshmen and sophomore years at the community college. Tuition and fee waivers for selected students is one type of inducement; special honor courses is another.

In addition to the immediate high school graduates, the colleges could establish special courses and offerings for currently enrolled students who have achieved a stipulated grade point average. Guest lectures, special plays or other events could be offered to these students as encouragement and recognition.

ADVISORY COMMITTEES TO THE LIBERAL ARTS

Advisory committees to occupational programs are common in most community colleges, and advisory committees to the humanities have become popular in some colleges in the past five years. Such boards directed to the liberal arts, however, are rare--if indeed they exist at all.

To maintain their currency, community college programs make connections with the communities they serve. These connections could be aided by an advisory committee whose purpose is to help the college maintain vital liberal arts programs. The committee can provide information, advice, and visibility for the programs; review information on trends in liberal arts education on the local, state, and national levels and so aid in keeping the programs current; offer policy reactions and comments on the programs from the points of view of persons outside the colleges; and aid in planning special events.

Advisory committee members can integrate educational efforts with community offerings and opportunities. Some may employ students who are completing a community college program or suggest areas of employment. Others may be able to show that the humanities, sciences, and arts can become an integral part of life, whether one pursues them as an occupation or as a non-vocational interest.

These committees can also assist faculty in formulating goals, objectives, and activities; help students and graduates of liberal arts programs find jobs; assist faculty members in relating instruction to community needs; develop public information programs; assess the adequacy of facilities, equipment, and teaching materials; assist in developing community surveys related to the liberal arts; develop cooperative education training plans and agreements; and recommend criteria to use in evaluating programs. Considerable information is available from both ERIC and the Center regarding advisory programs.

C-21

LIBERAL ARTS CAREER OPTION

The best structural elements of occupational programs and the most useful components in liberal arts courses could be merged into a liberal arts-career program. The program would be managed by a program head and a group of between five and ten faculty members. The curriculum would be comprised of pre-existing liberal arts courses selected for their general appeal. Students would be selected from the great cohort of recent high school graduates who are either unsure of the types of careers they wish to enter or are inadmissible to the selective occupational programs, but who know they are going to college because they want to be employable.

The program would center on the liberal arts along with cooperative work experience. Students would take traditional courses in the liberal arts plus a course in business. They would serve as apprentices in agencies and shops for which specialized training was not a requisite for job entry: department stores, small shops, insurance and brokerage agencies, and all types of business offices.

The purpose of this program would be to prepare students for work entry by assisting them to understand their environment, making them aware of the links that hold their society together, showing them how to get along with their fellow workers, teaching them to communicate in speech and in writing, preparing them to work with an agencies' clients. Placing the liberal arts at the core of such a program would be restorative to that curriculum area while at the same time it would afford students a sense of purpose in their studies. Faculty members working together with a lay advisory committee to the program would select the courses to be placed in it. The courses would

all be required; there should be few options within the program. The staff would also arrange for work billets for students in the program, devise admissions criteria, and publicize the program in the institution's feeder secondary schools.

As I noted earlier, many of these activities are already in place in almost all colleges. What we are urging is involvement, dialogue, and outreach so that more students are encouraged to enroll in the liberal arts, more students are helped in their transition from high school to college and from college to the university, and more students are given the proper background to succeed in their future work. All these activities should be amplified. Results will be worth the extra effort.

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
96 Powell Library Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024
FEB 4 1983